DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 722 EA 005 563

AUTHOR	Orton, Peter; Dickison, Wayne
TITLE	Change to Open Education. Two Schools in the Process.
INSTITUTION	National Association of Independent Schools, Boston, Mass.
PUB DATE	Oct 72
NOTE	38p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Association of Independent Schools, 4 Liberty Square, Boston, Massachusetts 02109 ($1.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Role; *Alternative Schools; *Case Studies (Education); Curriculum; *Educational Change; Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; *Elementary Schools; Humanization; *Open Education; Parent School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Charles River School; Massachusetts; Parmenter School

ABSTRACT

Case studies describe attempts to develop educational forms that are personally, intellectually, and socially valid in two Massachusetts elementary schools--the Charles River School, a small private school in Dover; and the Parmenter School, a public school. Both schools have tried to reorient the first six or seven years of formal education along the lines of certain British primary schools, variously termed "integrated day" or "open education." It is an approach that attempts to blend several goals of education--intellectual development, individualized instruction, purposive work, and social growth--in a pleasant and cooperative context. Both schools demonstrate an increased concern for human values, particularly in their awareness of the "hidden curriculum," and reflect the growing interest in availability of educational choice and alternatives. In one school, the change process resulted from significant parent involvement; while changes in the other school came about largely through the leadership of the chief administrator. (Author/WM)

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Change to Open Education

Two Schools in the Process

THE PARMENTER SCHOOL
Arlington, Massachusetts

by

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THE CHARLES RIVER SCHOOL
Dover, Massachusetts

by

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Foreword

by

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EA 005 563

October 1972

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
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Foreword

THESE ARE difficult times in American education — a period of transition, of despair and hope, of retrenchment and reform. Whether we can sustain the efforts to develop educational forms that are personally, intellectually, and socially valid remains to be seen. The accompanying account of two such efforts represents promising and exciting attempts by professionals and laymen to do just that.

First of all, both efforts involve serious attempts to think once more about schooling. More specifically, they have tried to reorient the first six or seven years of formal education along the lines of certain British primary schools. This approach has been variously termed "integrated day" or "open education" and has recently been introduced into the United States with considerable enthusiasm. It is an approach that attempts to blend several goals of education — intellectual development, individualized instruction, purposive work, social growth — with all of this taking place in a pleasant and cooperative context. It is not only exciting to see public and private schools like Parmenter and Charles River attempting this significant innovation; it is even more encouraging to see them trying to develop and extend basic ideas rather than just copying a formula. Open education is obviously not a "thing" that can be reproduced instantly in identical forms. It is, rather, a set of relatively general ideas and practices that can form the basis for a whole variety of school practices. Those ideas need development, nourishment, and elaboration in order to preserve their vitality and validity.

Second, both narratives illustrate another positive trend in American education: increased concern for human values. They speak of concern for the feelings of teachers, children, and parents; of the need to develop educational forms that promote personal growth; of attempts to deal with issues with sensitivity to individual aspirations and needs. This is but part of a growing movement (with obvious roots in the past) toward humanizing the curriculum and the schools. Not the least of these concerns is directed at the so-called "hidden curriculum": the implicit rules, conventions, atmosphere, and tone of a school that combine to give the institution power to affect its members. It is evident that the people involved in the Parmenter and Charles River experiments are sensitive to this need to orient the school to the needs of the children rather than the other way round. Third, and perhaps most profoundly for our society, these case studies reflect the growing interest in availability of educational choice and alternatives. This theme — the need to provide valid alternatives for families of varying life styles

and values — pervades both accounts. I can think of nothing more hopeful and healthy for a nation committed to individualism, pluralism, and opportunity than to have a variety of educational institutions flourish. These concepts of choice, variety, and alternatives are not only psychologically valid, since they recognize the enormous importance of individual differences among children; they also correspond to our political, cultural, and ethical traditions. We should all rejoice at the gradual but increasing acceptance of this principle, especially as we become more and more aware of some of the unfortunate legacies of the "melting pot" tradition.

The two studies also reflect significant differences: one is a private, the other a public, school. One changed partly as a result of significant parent involvement, while changes in the other came about largely through the leadership of the chief administrator. However, both cases show the need for hard work, hard thinking, careful preparation, and the importance of adapting basic ideas to the specific realities and needs of particular people at a given time. We will get no blueprints for specific and detailed action from these accounts. We can be inspired to work for similar purposes and with parallel sensitivities, but with techniques and plans specific to our individual situations. This booklet is not a primer on "how to introduce open education to your school," but it can be useful in stimulating the necessary thought, work, and action that are appropriate for equally promising adventures in education.

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THE PARMENTER SCHOOL

As the first snow fell in the winter of 1967, the sounds emanating from the classrooms of the Parmenter School, in Arlington, Massachusetts, told the familiar story of schoolroom sounds everywhere across the country. The business of education was in progress: the teacher at the blackboard posing problems and promoting skills; rows of clutched pencils hovering over small desks; some children eager to succeed and doing their best, others bored and resistant, with thoughts of release and escape.

The Plan

The effective management of a school system is often a delicate balance maintained by administrators who are sensitive to the pressures of the community, the needs of the teachers, and the welfare and education of the children. Occasionally this precarious equilibrium may be endangered by dissatisfaction with the schools by some portion of the community. As long as there are communities with people of diverse backgrounds, people having different goals and dreams, there will always be those who want something different from their schools. Some say this is the way it should be: that diversity and richness bring strength to our communities. In any case, it can make difficulties for the people who hold the reins. It can also offer opportunities for fresh thinking to take place.

Rumblings among a small group of parents were nothing new in Arlington. For years this Boston suburb had seen citizens' groups formed and dissolved, flurries of questions tossed to and fro at School Committee meetings, and vigorously debated PTA meetings. As one-time superintendent of schools Bert Roens observes, "The Parmenter School is located in an area of Arlington that is very difficult for administrators — that is, it has a mixed bag of parents. You have some parents very knowledgeable and interested in educational innovation; you have parents who are very conservative, who don't want any change. So you really have a somewhat polarized group. There is always rivalry as to who is to dominate the PTA. There is always that kind of pulling and tugging going on in our schools."

Not that there was no agreement among them. As Roens is quick to point out, "On any common ground they could agree on, they would do anything for the school. If I had come to them and said, 'Look, we're out of money, and we

can't get the windows washed or the building painted. What do you say we all get together and do it?' I'm sure we would have gotten that building painted or washed or whatever, even if we all had to lift the brushes!"

Actually, the pullings and tuggings at Parmenter point up the intense interest and involvement of parents in the schools. A strong point for Arlington — or any community, for that matter — is its concern for the education of its children. An active and aware citizenry can only help to heighten the responsiveness and vitality of the schools.

Even though groups of Parmenter parents did voice their interests, and their concerns were heard by those in charge, the school for the most part still reflected the wants and expectations of the majority of taxpayers. The talk by the disenchanted few of experimental studies and expanded arts and crafts was just that: talk. There was little significant change in the style of education.

Then that winter several important events occurred that helped radically to alter the whole tenor of classroom instruction in the Parmenter Elementary School in Arlington and began a quiet revolution in schooling in the Massachusetts suburb. The name of the change was "open education."

One important event was a lecture by Dr. Maurice Belanger, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, on his year with Jean Piaget in Geneva and his visits to primary schools in England. Robert Stevenson, principal of the Parmenter School, was in the audience. Apparently a spark was struck, for Stevenson sent for the books and articles available at that time and visited various independent and public schools that were already in the process of change. He visited the Underwood School in Newton and the Cambridge Friends and Fayerweather Street schools in Cambridge to see open classrooms in operation. He spoke to his superintendent about the possibility of incorporating some aspects of open education at Parmenter and encouraged parents to inform themselves about this approach.

By fortunate coincidence, a series of articles by Joseph Featherstone on English primary schools appeared in *The New Republic*. These reports were greeted with enthusiasm by the small coterie of concerned parents in Arlington, who made extra copies, passed them among their friends, and began talking about the notion of "open education." Although they had scarcely any idea or plan for implementation, they were excited about possibilities, and they continued to watch each week for more news from England.

"What was happening in Great Britain interested us," an Arlington mother of two said. "The style seemed consistent with the types of things a number of us had been talking about for so long: a more humane learning environment, more freedom of choice for the kids, more interest-centered learning, more *individualized* learning. As it finally turned out, it was just what we were looking for!"

"Featherstone wrote about things educationally positive and possible," another parent commented. "But we didn't jump in then. We sort of filed away open education in our heads. We knew about it as another alternative, and it wasn't until later that it came to fruition."

While British open education was quietly building a following in Arlington, early in the new year the actual spark for change occurred. At their monthly meeting in March, the Arlington School Committee announced that, because of the overcrowded situation expected for the coming year, two classes from the Parmenter School would have to be moved out and placed in the old Junior High Industrial Arts School (now the Central School) just down the street. Unless the town would approve a budget to build an addition onto Parmenter, the relocation could not be avoided. Passing such a budget was highly unlikely, for Arlington was feeling the same financial pressures as school districts throughout the nation.

The Industrial Arts building is certainly not the most attractive school plant in the community. Its weathered brown exterior now houses several classrooms, but at that time most of the ancient building was being used for administration, secretarial and business offices, psychological counseling, and special facilities for retarded children. To place two classrooms of children in this extension would effectively isolate them from the rest of their school community. It was not a happy move by the School Committee, but it seemed a necessary one.

When the news of the intended move reached the community, a number of families were upset, and several parents went individually to talk with Robert Stevenson, principal of Parmenter. They were extremely concerned and apprehensive, and they wanted to know what might possibly be done. As Mr. Stevenson recalls, "There were quite a lot of discussions going on throughout the year with parents, but this time it was a *very* critical issue. We just had to move some of the kids; there was nothing else we could do."

The small second-floor principal's office — hardly big enough for the two desks it housed — became the setting for some large concerns and was the site of a number of intense dialogues. One of those talks was especially eventful: a proposal for introducing an open classroom as a solution to the overcrowding problem. This suggestion became an immediate catalyst, and from then on the pace of the action quickened. On the evening of the same day a few parents met with Associate Professor David Purpel, of Harvard, also a parent of the school, to explain the idea. Together they outlined a tentative program and jotted down some of the details. The following morning they took their idea to the office of the superintendent and presented their case.

Perhaps central to Mr. Stevenson's plan for implementing a new style of education was his belief in "choice." The fact that no child would be forced to attend the open classroom was the single strongest element of the case. Only those parents who chose the new program would reap the results. No parent would be forced to enter his child in the experiment.

The school district would also stand to gain. In addition to alleviating overcrowding, the plan would explore new possibilities for education in Arlington. The idea of experimental programs was certainly not horrifying to most of the community, for Arlington had already attempted some new forms of education: vertical grouping and nongraded classes, and the Metco program for children

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from outside the community. The chance to explore different techniques was viewed as a "plus" for Arlington schools.

The group met with Superintendent Roens, who was skeptical but quite interested in the proposal. He suggested that they write a more formal proposal, and said that he would check on some of the logistics. The group went home quite optimistic. "We knew it was the way to break in with open education," said a mother of a five-year-old. "We proposed making those two classrooms 'open and voluntary.' The 'carrot,' of course, would be this new educational experience for the kids. So we made a few phone calls."

They did more than make a few phone calls. They met and developed possible ideas, they amassed literature, they reprinted still more copies of the historic Featherstone articles, and they educated themselves. "We learned about some seminars on open education going on at Harvard, so we attended them. We got booklets from the National Association of Independent Schools that told of English primary schools. We saw films from the Educational Development Center on the Leicestershire schools. We had to know what we were talking about."

As they learned, they drew up their proposal. Most important, they let others in the community know what was happening. "We decided that first we should talk to people we knew. We handed out hundreds of Featherstone articles to those leaning toward change. And then we tried to reach just about everybody, because we felt that it was important for *everybody* to know what was going on, for nothing to be hidden. The main thrust was personal contact — friend to friend — and the whole idea was to be nonthreatening."

The group also sought the expertise and energies of some of the educators in the area who had had experience with open classrooms, and special PTA meetings were called so that they could explain to the Arlington parents some of the fundamental concepts of open education. Speaking at the first such session was Matt Judson, headmaster of the Fayerweather Street School, an independent school. Perhaps Judson dealt too much with philosophical and theoretical concerns, and not enough with practical issues, for at the end of the evening there were still major doubts in the minds of many who had attended. So the planners quickly called for a second meeting, this time asking Edward Yeomans, of the National Association of Independent Schools, to address the community.

Yeomans' job was to articulate the philosophy of open education, to clarify its operational procedures, to answer questions, and, most important, to dispel doubts and allay fears. The meeting was scheduled, highly publicized, and, finally, filled to overflowing. "I remember Stevenson commenting that there had never been PTA meetings in which there was so much interest!" one parent remarked later.

Yeomans began slowly, carefully, showing slides of open classrooms, describing new practices. He noted that he shared the same apprehensions that the parents had — and then proceeded to deal explicitly with these. According to several people who were there, Yeomans struck just the right note. He was reassuring, logical, sensible, and supportive of the teachers. (One woman pointed

out that he was very "establishment-looking," which she felt was extremely important.)

It was this meeting that gained much popular support for the "Plan for Open Education." It was also this meeting at which the final, formal proposal was revealed.

The proposal, copies of which were on their way to members of the School Committee, outlined both the existing problem and the intended solution. Summarizing the overcrowded conditions in the elementary school, the first page explained why there was a need for two additional classrooms. Accompanying the text was a detailed breakdown of class sizes and projected distribution, which showed clearly that some action had to be taken. The proposal went on: "We would like to suggest that the school department use the opportunity presented by the overcrowding to develop an innovative program of early childhood education. This plan would do three things — (1) meet the building crisis; (2) provide a real and exciting choice for parents; and (3) enable the whole town to benefit from this educational exploration."

The proposal then specifically detailed the establishment of two classrooms of children in kindergarten through second grade to be set up at the Junior High Industrial Arts School. Descriptions and quotations from England followed, briefly noting the British experience and its proven educational success. Pointing out that some aspects of open education (vertical grouping) were not new to Arlington schools, the proposal concluded with the projected distribution, which would effectively solve the crowding problem. Again the point was made that "the children would attend classes at the Junior High not because they happen to be in a particular grade, but because their parents welcome the opportunity to involve them in a different kind of learning situation."

The proposal for an open classroom at the Parmenter School was signed by over a hundred families, and according to the *Arlington Advocate*, a local newspaper, parents of almost 90 children had indicated their desire to participate in the program, should it gain committee support. During the week, they had conducted a telephone poll to determine community attitudes and had found that, though reactions were mixed, there were enough supporters to fill the classrooms. The next step was the School Committee.

The members of the committee had each received a copy of the proposal as well as a reprint of an article on open education by Edward Yeomans. The committee deliberated, and after brief discussion took no formal action, tabling the proposal for further inquiry. While this by no means indicated the plan was to be defeated, the group of parents who had so enthusiastically begun the proposal suddenly became discouraged and depressed. They believed that their plan would meet with resistance from the committee and die before it got a chance in the classroom.

During the following week, about a dozen of the parents favoring the open classroom called another meeting to discuss possible action for a final "push"

for their proposal. They invited Assistant Superintendent Lawrence Anderson to attend, hoping that he would counsel them about what they might do. (He had been sympathetic to their plan, but had had no actual hand in the drive for implementation.) Anderson did meet with them, and he suggested that they schedule a private luncheon with the School Committee. He felt that at such a time they could present their case more carefully and better outline the advantages and disadvantages of the plan.

The luncheon took place with only a few of the committee members present. Despite the sparse turnout, the group went ahead with the scheduled program — a number of short presentations by respected educators from the Boston area. "It was more like an informal intellectual seminar," says David Purpel, who spoke to the committee at the luncheon. "At the end of the session I felt confident that the committee members were leaving with the understanding that open education was at least intellectually respectable. I think this helped to open the door for the passage of the proposal."

If the luncheon was the door-opener, then what happened at the next meeting was the long-awaited opportunity. The School Committee met two weeks after the luncheon in a regular session, and the proposal came to the floor under "old business." At that point, Assistant Superintendent Anderson rose to address the committee. He had prepared a statement of support and recommendation for open education, and proceeded to deliver what a number of people later termed a strong, logical argument for implementing the plan. He emphasized that once started it would cost no more to maintain an open classroom than it would to maintain a regular classroom. "Anderson had done his homework on open education," Mr. Purpel says. "He gave a full, formal, systematic review of the issues and an analysis of the movement. The quality of his preparation reflected the seriousness of his thought."

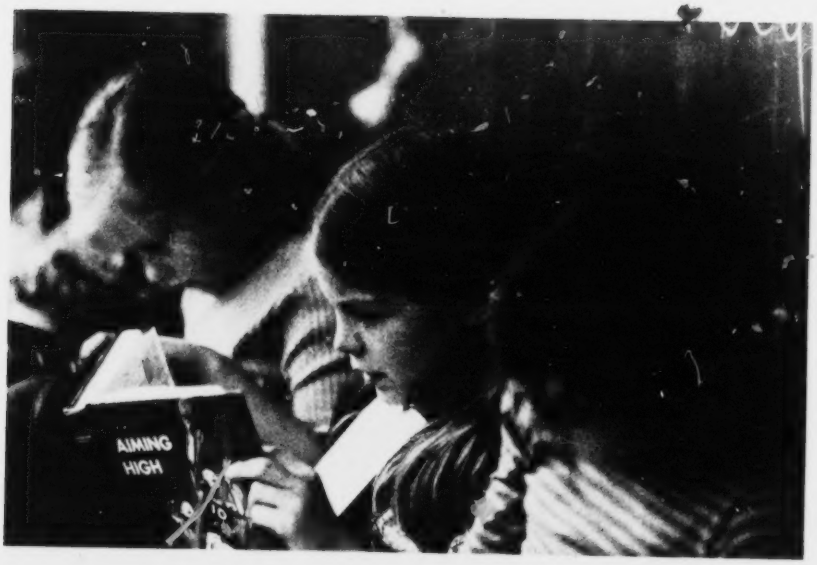
If the committee members were not convinced before the Anderson speech, they certainly were when he finished. There was some brief discussion and then followed the official vote. The tally was unanimous: the proposal for open education had passed its final test.

Following the meeting, many of the happy and excited parents gathered at one of the homes in the community where the nucleus of open-education supporters had often met to formulate strategy for their proposal. Their celebration marked the end of the hard, uphill effort to initiate a new educational style in the Arlington schools. It also marked the beginning of yet more difficult work toward the actual implementation of that new plan.

The People

"As I recall, my principal concern was the faculty of the school," Bert Roens says, looking back on those first days of initiating the new plan. "I thought the faculty would be our biggest stumbling block."

Having headed the management of the Arlington schools for some eleven years, Roens had indeed come to know the temper of his organization, and his



concern regarding the feelings of his teachers was not ill-founded. His initial meeting on open education with the faculty of the Parmenter School, set up immediately after the School Committee vote, was meant to explain concepts and to feel out opinions. According to Roens, that meeting was marked by "some hostility on the part of a few."

Not that this was surprising to him. He understood well the anxiety that his staff would experience. After all, most of the teachers at Parmenter had been teaching there for some time, were tenured, and were sure to be reluctant to make any major overhaul in educational philosophy. If his staff were inept, or recalcitrant, or if the children's test scores were consistently low, then there might be some need for change, but his teachers were *good* teachers doing their jobs competently. The children seemed to be happy, their parents reasonably satisfied, and test scores equal to if not higher than the national norm. So the question in the minds of the faculty was an obvious one: if they were doing their jobs well, and they felt that they were, why did the school need to try a different approach? What was wrong with their way? Naturally they were a bit puzzled, if not upset.

"That first meeting was quite long," says Roens. "Basically what I did was what I had often done with any innovative program being brought into the schools: I put it up to the teachers. I hoped they would want to give it a try. But if not — if they felt it was not to the advantage of the pupils — we would throw it out!"

Most of the teachers at that first meeting were sufficiently interested in the

plan to accept it for a year on a trial basis. Although a majority wanted to give it a try, there was a small minority still hostile to the whole idea. This faction kept maintaining that it would not work, that it would be disruptive, and that it was not in the best interests of the students. To their objections Roens responded, "Well, we don't know. You may be right. But we won't know until we try it, so let's give it a whirl!" To that there could be little dispute.

So it seemed that a large majority of the Parmenter teachers were interested enough at least to try the experiment. Roens, however, is quick to point out one of the subtleties of operating a school system: "You should understand that being democratic in public schools often means that many go along with the administration because they are fearful of not going along." He feels this was in part the case with the decision to institute open education.

While the faculty may have felt implicit pressure to try the new system, many of the parents were not so moved. According to Roens, there was a group of parents who came to him and expressly stated that their children were to have no part of the program. "We don't want this newfangled thing in our school!" Roens remembers them saying. "We just don't want it, and we feel we represent a majority!" "I used pretty much the same technique," Roens says. "I said to them, 'Try it, you might like it!' Since we planned to run a parallel program, they didn't have to enter their child if they didn't want him to be in it. So they really had no argument."

It was no surprise to the administration that some of the parents were threatened by the new idea. "The trouble with the term 'open education,' " Lawrence Anderson says, "is that it is synonymous in the public eye with the type of progressive education that the proponents of John Dewey advocated — not John Dewey, but his *proponents* — letting little kids do anything they like. So if you say to the average person, 'Do you believe in open education?' their answer is 'Hell no! We don't believe in that!' It takes a lot of effective public relations work to break down those feelings."

Anderson says that, in those early days of innovating the program, he seemed to be spending much of his time explaining the concepts of open education to Arlington service groups, church organizations, PTA groups, and mothers' coffee hours. "I must have drunk more coffee in Arlington than I ever drank before or since! Whenever two or more were gathered together, I was there also. In this way we reassured a number of the doubters."

While the community might have had certain fears lessened as it came to understand the actual workings of the program, there was at least one concern that was not immediately resolved. Quite a few parents were worried that, should the idea prove successful, the entire school might adopt the open plan. Some of the older teachers especially voiced this feeling. To allay this fear, Superintendent Roens emphasized that provision would always be made for those who were not interested in the program. The implication was that, if the success of the plan resulted in open classrooms throughout Parmenter, Roens would arrange for transfer of the particular student or teacher to another school

in the district. Although this may not have been the ideal solution, it did seem to soothe most fears at the time.

But the plan for open education in the minds of the administrators did not include using every classroom in the building. In fact, they felt very strongly that the major advantage of the new program was that it would encourage diversity. This diversity in classroom approach would allow for "choice" — both for parents, in selecting the learning environment most suitable for a particular child, and for teachers, in developing the kinds of classroom activities most compatible with their individual styles. Principal Robert Stevenson remembers calming several teachers who, feeling threatened by open education, thought it would force them out of the school. "I couldn't tell them often enough that the strength of our school is based on 'preference': preference for parents, preference for teachers, preference for the children. If we were all 'open,' we'd be just as rigid as if we were all 'traditional.' We need to have choice. It's in keeping with all our democratic principles."

As fears were articulated, they were examined and resolved. Indeed, the strategy for change in the Arlington schools reflected the openness of the proposed new classrooms. The administrators were taking great pains to let everybody in on all their preparations, airing all the issues, and allowing all concerns to be voiced. When they issued a general call for teachers at Parmenter who might be interested in heading the open classrooms, they were not surprised to get several volunteers. They also learned of a teacher in the area who had had experience in Leicestershire classrooms and who, when she had heard about Arlington's new program, indicated interest in teaching one of the classes.

Then, with plans rolling along quite smoothly, a hitch occurred. It was discovered that the two rooms in the Industrial Arts building to be used for the open classrooms were in violation of the fire code. The building inspector and fire commissioner had examined the structure and found both rooms unsafe for five-year-olds: there was no easy emergency exit. The plan for open education, which had been initiated mainly to alleviate overcrowding, was no longer the panacea it had once seemed to be. The open classrooms had been approved, filled with children, and ready to begin the year, but now could offer no solution to the problem of overcrowding.

According to Mr. Stevenson, there was only one feasible solution to the problem. "The only place we could have the classes was in the Parmenter building, and the fire inspector told us that Rooms 5 and 6 were the only two rooms which he would approve for kindergartners. There was no other place we could go unless we put up a tent out in the yard."

Overcrowding was not the only problem, for there was an even more complicated element involved. The two rooms in Parmenter that could be used for open classrooms were the "homes" of two veteran teachers. According to Stevenson, "They had, quite understandably, come to feel that these were their rooms, and they didn't like the idea of being pushed out. So there was a great deal of emotional involvement, and that started an 'anti-feeling' about open education."

Several other factors made for strong sentiments. As the year began, the furniture for the two new rooms began to arrive. Big round tables, bookcases, and long work desks caught the eyes of the regular, "traditional" teachers, who then felt underequipped and underfurnished. The School Committee had allotted $2500 to the open classrooms, the usual amount for any new class. The newly purchased supplies made the other teachers in the school acutely aware of their unfilled needs. When the school year began, reporters, administrators, and interested parents poured into the new classrooms. Despite continued reassurance and support from Mr. Stevenson, the "traditional" teachers no longer felt quite the same. There was a "new baby" at Parmenter, and it was attracting all the attention.

The open classrooms made their debut. Having failed to solve the overcrowding, having moved two teachers out of their usual rooms, having caused two traditional classes to meet alone down in the old Industrial Arts building, and having garnered new equipment, new furniture, *and* the spotlight, open education began its life in Arlington.

The Tough First Year

"I didn't quite know how to handle everything that first year. There were just so many things to do and to look for to make sure that things were going well: what was happening in the reading area, all the noise going on at the math table, the fight breaking out in the clay area, making sure you got to see everybody regularly in reading and math, keeping in touch with all the parents. Yes, it was a very tough year."

Jane Bresnahan leans back against a fabric collage designed by her first graders and reminisces about her initiation into the open-classroom experience. Having taught for almost a decade in traditional classrooms, she found the new style to be considerably different from what she had previously encountered.

That there would be problems of organization and difficulties in setting up the "proper structure for the children to make adequate choices" could almost have been predicted. There were also quite a few other problems that were not foreseen and sapped the strength of the first two open-classroom teachers at the Parmenter School.

"Furniture and materials were problems," says Meg Atkins, the British-trained teacher who taught her first open classroom in the room adjoining Jane Bresnahan's. "Equipment was not ordered until late spring, so it arrived in dribs and drabs through the year. A janitors' strike during the summer prevented us from setting up early. I remember having to unpack and sort out the room with the children there, which was not an easy thing to do."

But Mrs. Atkins also points out that sometimes disadvantages have their positive sides. Going in headfirst actually proved to be helpful because, from the start, the room looked completely different from the traditional classroom. "This excited a lot of the very keen parents. They came in, saw the room, and

thought 'Oh, this is just what we wanted to happen!' Consequently, they gave us tremendous support. If we had gone more slowly, perhaps they might not have seen the difference as quickly. They might have been impatient."

Nor were the children bothered by the disarray. They had obviously been prepared by their parents for the open classroom and anticipated something altogether different. Although the physical disorder did not bother them, interpreting the structure of their new environment did present problems. Because it was so new to the teachers, it was difficult to spell out the structure that the children needed to learn: how to investigate and explore materials, how to use time, the new freedom of movement. Communicating a structure to children while the teacher herself is feeling the way is not an easy task, and both teachers attest to that fact. The older children, having spent several years in traditional classrooms, found it particularly hard to settle in. They would not take suggestions for activities as readily as the five-year-olds, and they had trouble developing a constructive attitude regarding the younger children in the room. In subsequent years they would serve as guides for their less experienced classmates, but in that first year they found it hard to adapt and thus could not "set the example." This was an especially difficult problem to solve.

Delayed arrival of furniture made things more difficult. The absence of tables and desks left a great expanse of open space, which encouraged a good deal of movement and noise. "Perhaps I was a bit uptight about the noise level that year," Mrs. Bresnahan says, "but it wasn't the kind of busy, purposeful noise that I hear now. It was the seven-year-olds, I believe, who were having difficulty settling down."

"I think we spend more time now in 'class meetings' than we did that first year," Mrs. Atkins says, "and that's made a big difference." She observes that, in later years, both she and Mrs. Bresnahan have used group sessions to outline the ground rules for the classroom, talking about each interest area and its possibilities, explaining equipment and its use. These class meetings help the children get a general sense of the workings of the room. "Coming together at the end of the day to discuss things that have happened also proves quite important," adds Mrs. Atkins. "It's surprising now to think that the first year we didn't use that technique as often as we could have."

Having to devote extra time and energy to organizing the classroom meant there was less time for other tasks. At the same time that they were getting their classrooms together, there were parents wanting to talk with them, teachers wanting to talk with them, demands from outside for meetings to explain about the rooms, and requests for reports to the School Committee. Doing public relations work while learning and teaching a new style was quite a burden. Fortunately they had some help from parents.

"The parents wanted to make closer contact with the school," explains Mrs. Atkins, "so part of the agreement was that they should come in and work in the classroom, usually on a particular project like cooking. In the beginning it was hard, though, because we didn't know exactly how the rooms were to run. It

was very difficult to have aides then because they had their own questions, and if you aren't clear yourself, how can you help them? But after a while we were getting things together, and the parents were enjoying it so much that they were going out and telling about the good things that were happening in the class. So the parents were helping with a lot of the public relations."

When they did get some free time, the two teachers usually spent it together comparing notes, sharing ideas, and generally supporting each other. "It was often comforting to know that the same problems found in one classroom were happening in the other as well. You need to know that you're not alone."

The two teachers were certainly not alone, though at times, overwhelmed by their tasks, they may have felt very much estranged from teachers with more familiar concerns. For this reason, and also to help smooth the transition in the classroom, both of the Parmenter teachers had, the preceding summer, attended a workshop as part of their training for the open classroom. Held at the Shady Hill School in Cambridge and organized by Edward Yeomans, the workshop consisted of four weeks of a wide variety of activities directed by two head teachers from England, Philip Sherwood and Rosemary Williams. Most of the activities involved presenting the teachers with experiences equivalent to those the children would encounter: having to make choices, having to become involved in their own learning, having to learn from handling materials. There were also specific sessions held to explain different areas of the curriculum: Nuffield math, for instance, was given each Wednesday. Each day a different subject was offered. "Perhaps the most important function of that workshop was the support it provided during the following school year. We met a large num-

ber of people who had similar ideas about education, and they served as a resource as the year went on."

The two teachers admit that during the summer they began to get quite anxious about practical details and how they were actually going to set things up in September. They were urged by the workshop staff to keep those questions in the back of their minds and not to attempt a too-literal application. This proved to be good advice. In their search for helpful hints about practical details, for instance, they had picked up the idea of providing each child with a writing booklet with unlined pages because beginning writers have trouble placing their letters on a given line. The important thing — getting the word down on paper — far outweighed the notion of proper placement. It was believed, as it is in England, that children manage eventually to become very neat writers. Unlined writing books soon became a stumbling block for the older children, however, for they had learned to write on lines. Conversely, the blankbooks were a hindrance to the seven-year-olds (who began to regress) because they needed to learn placement in their penmanship.

Despite other instances of misapplication of ideas, there were practical hints that did work well and helped to relieve many problems. While both teachers felt that there could have been more practical give and take, they did come away from Shady Hill that summer with a store of information and the knowledge that there were dangers in bringing it *all* to the classroom. "On the whole the workshop didn't give us a recipe or model," Mrs. Atkins says. "It gave us experience and the chance to explore the materials. Its main value was as a support group — just being able to know that there were other people doing what we were trying to do, and that it wasn't too 'far-out.' In that sense it was very useful."

So the two teachers came to Parmenter that fall with a summer's worth of workshop experience, a certain amount of apprehension, and a good deal of enthusiasm. They did feel a tension in the school at the start, due in part to the time it takes for any innovation to settle in, but it did not last long. And though they did not feel completely cut off from other faculty members, they were spending less time with their colleagues because they needed time alone to plan and organize their classrooms.

It took a while for the whole school to grow accustomed to the new style. At the beginning there were the more traditional teachers who liked to see the children in regular lines in the hallways, but who instead occasionally found children reading or working alone in the hall, and who then wondered what exactly this new classroom was about. As time went on, however, some of the new techniques spread throughout Parmenter to the other rooms as well. Robert Stevenson remembers seeing things happening much more informally all over the school. "Even in the most traditional classrooms, I began to see a few scatter rugs that the teacher had brought in from home, and there would be children working on the floor. Teachers began, on their own, to loosen up a little bit."

There were casualties. One of the more established teachers felt particularly

threatened by open education and decided to retire. "I don't think she would have left teaching that year if we had not instituted the new program," Roens says. "She felt her way was best, and she just could not coexist with the new techniques. It is a perplexing thing that a teacher like this, who does an amazingly good job, cannot adapt. And in some ways I don't think she should have to."

Fortunately for the administration, and for the two open-classroom teachers, the faculty members at Parmenter accepted the changes that were taking place. They tolerated much of the noise that occasionally spilled out into the halls and drew away the attention of their students. They attended the many extra faculty meetings that fall and the previous spring without complaint or request for reimbursement. Whatever fears there were at first mellowed as the year went on. By December, both Mrs. Bresnahan and Mrs. Atkins felt that their children were functioning well in the open situation. They regarded themselves as "lucky, in that it often takes a whole year to accomplish such changes."

In summing up, Robert Stevenson says, "I think one of the strengths we have here at the Parmenter School is that we have two different types of classrooms available for parents to choose, two different kinds of classrooms for *teachers* to choose. We've never forced a teacher into an open classroom. Nor have we done this with the children."

The beginning weeks of struggle finally flowered into classroom periods of purposeful activity and student-generated learning. Due in large measure to the efforts of the teachers — not only from the pioneers in the open classrooms but from the others as well — the Parmenter School's journey into educational change began the first, forward step in a strong, substantial way. The "tough first year" was met and managed, and the school went on its way to becoming a model of innovation for other communities to watch and emulate.

The Fruits of Change

Every day at noon a bell rings in the Parmenter School to signal the beginning of lunch hour — time for the children to go home for lunch.

Nancy Daigle usually spends the first five or ten minutes of that hour convincing a number of her students that they must go home, that "no, the school rules won't allow students to remain in the school building." Each day it may be a different child who needs to be gently coaxed out the door with the reassurance that the particular project he is involved in will still be waiting when the class returns. Sometimes there may be a dozen who wish to stay, but it never fails that at least one or two are reluctant to leave. That is the way things have been going in Room 4 since September.

Nancy Daigle teaches in Room 4, one of the five open classrooms in Parmenter added since the start of the experiment in 1968-69. There are now seven open classrooms altogether (five in Parmenter, two in the Industrial Arts building) and seven "traditionals" in Parmenter. This balance of open and tradi-

tional classrooms has produced in the school a decidedly different atmosphere from that of the first year — no longer one of experiment but rather two valid educational styles coexisting under the same roof. It appears to be an exciting place for children and teachers to work.

"Sure, the children enjoy school a whole lot more," says Miss Daigle, who, before taking a year off to observe British primary schools, had taught in a traditional classroom in Parmenter. "I love the open classroom, and it would be difficult for me to teach another way now, but sometimes I have doubts whether the children are learning more than before."

Joan Kavanaugh, who teaches in the room adjacent to Miss Daigle's, also voices that sentiment: "I don't think they're learning more skills than the children in the [traditional] classroom across the hall, but they're certainly learning *how* to learn. Isn't that what education is all about?"

While many people may agree with this educational philosophy, the administration certainly has not sought to prove the worth of the experiment in these terms. Repeatedly stressing the importance of the "3 R's," Assistant Superintendent Anderson points out that he would not condone a program in which the children are not as well versed in reading, writing, and arithmetic as in the traditional curriculum. Does he believe the program has worked, or are there doubts in his mind as well? "Although I never felt I had enough proof on tests," he says, "the facts do seem to indicate that the best students did better than ever before on the traditional tests; the average child did as well on the tests, and perhaps a little bit better; and the below-average children didn't do any better, didn't do any worse, but they liked school a whole lot better. And for that reason I favor open education."

Many more parents in Arlington began to favor open education, too, though perhaps not for the same reasons as Mr. Anderson. Their good feelings toward the open classroom grew out of what they saw happening to their children — for most of them, the growing enjoyment of attending school. As the children began to get excited, their parents' excitement grew. Even so, some of the more enthusiastic parents had doubts about the academic skills involved. Some requested that their children be assigned more "worksheets" in class, the type used extensively in the more traditional rooms. A number of others withdrew their children from the classrooms after the first year because they feared that the basic cognitive skills — such as multiplication tables — were not being stressed. Thus not all parents viewed the new style as a totally rewarding experience for their children.

It must be noted, however, that the degree of parent satisfaction with the open classroom varied with the individual class. Each particular open-classroom teacher stressed different aspects of the "curriculum," each set a different tone in the class, each created an attitude toward schoolwork that was qualitatively different from that set by others. Some stressed formal skills more than others. At least one teacher explicitly concentrated on "social learning" during a major portion of the year. It is difficult to produce an across-the-board critique of

Parmenter's open classrooms in those first years for, like classrooms in general, they could be as different from each other as night and day.

When most parents found at the end of the year that their children were enjoying school a great deal more, they asked the administration to set up classes to allow the children to continue in the open environment. Parents of other children also indicated interest after having observed the success of the first year. With growing support from the community, teachers who had at first been reluctant began to volunteer for the program. "I was very excited that something new was happening," Alice Corbett remembers, "and while I wasn't altogether pleased with what was going on in my traditional room, I wanted to be sure that the new approach was going to succeed before I tried it. If the experiment was going to flounder, I wasn't sure I wanted to get my feet wet. I would say that half the year went by before I was truly convinced it was the right approach."

Beginning her new classroom during the second year of open education in Arlington, Mrs. Corbett was fortunate in that she could draw on the experiences and advice of Meg Atkins and Jane Bresnahan, who continued to direct open classrooms and who found themselves "much more relaxed and comfortable than in the first year." In addition to having those two experienced teachers in the school to help them, Alice Corbett and Rita D'Amico went to another summer workshop sponsored by NAIS. They also came away with some important practical advice — ways of keeping track of reading, organizing materials, getting the children to record what they were doing in different activity areas —

though everything certainly was not outlined for them. Important, too, was all the "help" the program was beginning to attract.

"We soon became a training ground for open education teachers," Robert Stevenson says. "Harvard, Lesley Boston University, Tufts, and Boston College were soon sending us student teachers to place in our open classrooms." This created a problem for the principal, who did not want his traditional teachers to feel neglected. "We've been making a strong effort to keep an equal distribution of student help among the different types of classrooms, but we have never forced a student aide on a teacher who might not want one."

The publicity that Parmenter had begun to attract brought not only an influx of student teachers but also visitors from other school districts who looked to Arlington as a resource for possible changes in their schools. "We were getting people from all over Massachusetts and from many places out of state, too. A day didn't go by without at least one visitor," Stevenson says. The number of visitors grew so greatly that year, in fact, that Stevenson had to back off and restrict the number of onlookers. "Naturally I was proud that we had something going over here, and was willing to say 'C'mon over and have a look!' but soon it was disrupting the school. We just had to say stop."

Although visits from outsiders were regulated, increased numbers of parents from the community continued to visit, observe, and support the notion of open education. By the end of the second year so many more parents had praised the program that two more open classrooms were established. This enthusiasm eventually spread to another elementary school in Arlington as well as to the junior high school, which found it necessary to alter its program significantly in order to accommodate parents and children raised in the new style.

"We began gradually, and it grew naturally," says Anderson, "and that's important. You've got to use evolution, not revolution." Anderson also notes that after the original outlay of $2500 for each of the first two classrooms expenses began to level off. A few hundred dollars were allocated over the next several years for new furniture, and then no more funding was needed. "Initially it cost more, but in the long run it evened out, so in essence it cost about the same as traditional education. That's also important to keep in mind."

The lasting success of such a program comes principally from identifying and meeting certain human needs, foremost of which is the need for competent, experienced teachers who are specifically trained for directing open classrooms. Parents need to be given a choice between types of classrooms for their children. By valuing excellence in traditional teaching as well as in the open classroom, the principal and the superintendent can provide strong moral and administrative support for the program and for all those who are involved in it. Finally, parents need to be actively engaged in the education of their children and willing to examine change with intelligence. There are doubtless other factors, too; these happen to be the ones that were most important to the Arlington experience.

THE CHARLES RIVER SCHOOL

THIS account of change in a small, independent elementary school as seen through the eyes of its headmaster is fragmentary and is deliberately not presented in a statistical or scholarly style, in order to emphasize the human and emotional context of change as I saw it.

Charles River School, in Dover, Massachusetts, was founded in 1911 by a number of local families who found the local public schools to be inadequate. In addition, most of the founding families were products of Greater Boston's independent schools. Consequently, until about ten years ago, the school was seen as a place where children were "prepared" for admission at the seventh grade level to these institutions.

BEGINNING

Fortunately, my arrival coincided with several local and national events. The local communities from which we drew our students were starting to broaden their socioeconomic base considerably because of the development of large tracts of land. The local public schools had regionalized within the surrounding towns, and public education in that sector, kindergarten through twelfth grade, had begun a process of rapid growth. The local secondary independent day schools to which we had been sending our students started to take a hard look at whether the seventh or eighth grades, on the lower end of their operations, could be sustained educationally and financially. Finally, there was a growing national feeling that elementary education was more and more the place where interesting things were happening.

All these events were reflected tangibly by the increasing number of parents who wanted a variety of alternatives — public, private, and philosophical — for their children. They had no preconceived ideas of where these alternatives were to be found. Indeed, many of the questions I was asked in interviews with the selection committee related not only to the future of Charles River School but to that of independent education as a whole. I have forgotten many of my responses, but one remains very much in my mind: the elementary child who is approaching adolescence needs a variety of flexible alternatives for his educa-

tion. More often than not he or she is having a hard enough time with muscle coordination, self-awareness, and attitudes toward life in general without having to be on the bottom of a 7-through-12 spectrum or forced into an endless, competitive school setting.

Experiencing the usual whirlwind of activities that first summer, I wondered when and how I was going to get down to the business of education. I remember the first formal trustees' meeting that I attended. Somehow, from conversations with colleagues prior to taking the job, I had been led to expect that a common tendency of independent school boards in schools of our size was to get involved in an endless series of "what-color-should-we-paint-the-front-door?" discussions. I was therefore surprised to realize during that meeting that we spent most of our time talking about education and that the board expected to learn about education through a structure or format provided by me. After talks with many people, I have come to feel that we were well ahead of what was going on in many other schools.

I was fortunate, among new headmasters, in being welcomed by a very dedicated group of people who were already at the school. Like many comparable institutions at the time, the faculty was composed primarily of older married women, many of whom had given substantial and loyal service to the school. I am fairly sure that several of them were waiting to see what my first real blunder would be, and there were many blunders that first fall. A curious thing happened, however. The faculty gathered around and supported my decisions whether they agreed with them or not. In fact, I soon came to learn that I was expected to share with and support them in comparable situations. To admit that one was human and fallible by no means detracted from the ultimate discharge of responsibility or duty. Rather, it emphasized the humane qualities of the people connected with the school and the bond between the faculty and headmaster.

In 1966 the school was organized around self-contained classrooms with a master teacher and an assistant in each grade, kindergarten through sixth. There was some crossing over from class to class and much evidence of individualized instruction, which took place through the teachers' direction rather than through students' initiative. It was a creative group of teachers, and new and interesting ideas for the curriculum were not lacking. Teachers had gone out to visit other schools that were beginning to change and reported their observations to the faculty as a whole. (Indeed, it is a tribute to the faculty of that small school that they felt part of the mainstream of American education.) As I look back on it, I think we actually were beginning to use some forms of the open classroom – integrated day without knowing exactly what we were doing in a theoretical sense.

In 1966 the school plant consisted of an old farmhouse and barn complex coupled with a new gym and a building for three classrooms completed in 1958. The new facility housed our lower grades, and the old farmhouse housed the

balance of the school together with dining facilities, art, shop, music, and so forth. There were few large open spaces indoors, but the teachers managed to make the most of what space they had. Because the school was fortunate in its landholdings, there was some room for additional playing fields and future expansion. Thus the stage was set for an obvious question from the trustees: "What should be the school's direction of growth over the next few years?"

In beginning to answer this question, I soon found myself at work both with the faculty and with the trustees, who established the first long-range planning committee in the school's history. I was expected not only to contribute to this group but also to develop a philosophical outline and statement of needs for the school.

The committee began its work with a traditional set of questions: where we had been, where we were now, where we proposed to go, and how we proposed to get there. One of the first questions I asked the board to consider individually was "Why should independent education in general and the Charles River School in particular exist?" Answers varied widely, with many of them reflecting the historical path the school had followed in educating the children of the founding families. There was general agreement that the school was providing a viable alternative to local public education. At the time, this alone seemed sufficient reason for our existence. I know now, however, that we have more basic reasons for our existence.

The balance of the year was taken up with the preparation of a report that was presented late in the spring. It consisted of several key recommendations, the first of which was that the school expand modestly from its enrollment of 130 to somewhere around 200. This recommendation was based on some interesting social, economic, and demographic studies made by some friends in graduate school. They indicated a substantial market emerging in the towns from which we drew our students. The number of 200 evolved partially as a result of (1) providing an economic base capable of sustaining the school's operations and (2) being large enough to provide opportunities for more "mix" without becoming overwhelmingly large. (I should add that I find it difficult to know more than 200 students at any one time.)

Other sections of the report contained recommendations of the faculty and myself that we expand by adding a prekindergarten group (four-year-olds) as well as seventh and eighth grades. Our recommendation for the four-year-old group was based on the increasing demands of children who had outgrown the educational resources of home or small nursery school environments. The addition of seventh and eighth grades was a bit more controversial, since it would mean a deliberate overlap with the seventh and eighth grade programs in the independent secondary schools to which we were sending children as well as in the public middle or junior high schools. The report also contained recommendations concerning space, since it seemed clear that a new facility would be needed, as would more land for playing fields.

Here was the first stumbling block. The minute the report began to deal with

tangible needs — buildings and land — it was hard to get people back to philosophical concerns. We found ourselves imagining all kinds of beautiful structures surrounded by acres of greenery. I now see that this is perhaps the most common trap that schools embarking on programs of planned change can fall into. It is so easy to feel that all difficulties, real or imagined, can be solved by the additions of facilities or space. It is a disastrous route to take and can cost untold grief in the end.

In spite of the misguided excitement generated by the possibility of new buildings, the philosophical aspects of the report were accepted by the trustees and the school was committed to see if they could be put into effect. At this point parents had not been formally informed of these decisions, and so other questions emerged that were concerned with how to bring them into the decision-making process. The committee therefore decided to spend most of the second year presenting plans for additional grades and new facilities to the parents. There were debates whether we should consult parents through a questionnaire or small group discussions, or whether instead the trustees should exercise their power to set the course of the school and then "sell" the plan to the parent body. Unfortunately we took the latter route, with the trustees developing a total package and involving the parents in an informal way, and then, at the end of the year, presenting them with a program for their approval.

During this second year individualized programs continued to develop. Through trial and error we started concentrating our energies on specific program developments to fill some of the voids. In the midst of all this a curious philosophical dilemma confronted us in connection with a reading program that was successfully helping a number of students who had perceptual handicaps and who had been unsuccessful in other schools. At that time we were probably somewhat ahead of neighboring schools, public and private, in our recognition of perceptual handicaps, because we were being sought out as a specialized school. Pressure from present and prospective parents to do even more in this area culminated in an identity crisis during the winter, again raising questions about the over-all direction that the school should take (which, surprisingly enough, had not been clearly addressed in the report). These questions indicated that, while we were going to expand and perhaps build new facilities, the student body, or image of the school, was going to remain substantially the same. The trustees' minutes record debates on whether to specialize in the education of perceptually handicapped children or to continue as a broad-based community-family school. It was finally decided that we should continue to offer a reading program that would help students who could handle our over-all program but that we should not make any deliberate attempt to specialize in the field of perceptual handicaps. Right or wrong, the decision was made, and we stuck by it.

One offshoot of the deliberations on this issue was the realization that the school needed to spend some time trying to articulate what it was really doing. By the end of the year, the traditional emphasis on preparing youngsters for

next grades or schools was slowly but surely dissolving. In its place came a growing confidence in our ability to provide an education that was suited to the needs, as we saw them, of each age group in our school.

While this was taking place the faculty was slowly changing. Through retirements and the addition of some new teachers, the group as a whole was becoming younger. Although there were only four new teachers, some interesting forces were at work: most of them were men; they were married; and they were young, with some strong convictions about how things should be done. As I scanned resumés and conducted interviews in those first two years, one part of me said that a reasonable balance must be kept in terms of philosophy and age, while the other part of me was busily identifying or not identifying with the potential candidates sitting in my office. I don't know how it works for other people, but I found myself hiring people who were close to my own thought process and way of doing things. (This was more often a matter of personality than of philosophical outlook per se.) Doubtless, also, the tendency to gather congenial colleagues during a time of planned change is a natural instinct on the part of the person in charge.

Evaluating

The second year closed on a mixed note. On the surface, things were relatively quiet in terms of the usual parent, faculty, or student concerns. I was lulled into a false sense of security as the year ended without any overt catastrophe.

However, looking back on that period and the events of that summer, I

realize that there was a substantial amount of ferment going on. It was not the sort that would build up to a destructive extent, but rather a seeking and questioning attitude that had been quietly going on in the school community for some months — quietly, because we had not given out enough information about our plans. As one parent told me at a gathering that summer, "We trust you and the faculty to do what is right and appropriate for the over-all direction of the school, but we are unsure as to exactly what you are proposing, and I guess that makes me afraid."

This type of comment came to me and to other members of the school community on several occasions. For whatever reason, we did not take heed of the gradual probing that manifested itself in these separate statements. The only explanation I can give for our attitude is missionary zeal: conviction that what we were doing and what we had done was absolutely right and correct. We found ourselves somewhat tongue-tied when trying to articulate to anyone "on the outside" the emotional feeling, the sharing, that was starting to take place. "What does it matter?" we were saying subconsciously. "They couldn't possibly understand what it is that really is happening. Granted, they're paying the bills and supporting us, and we should tell them something, but they really can't understand."

Zeal for change can easily cause polarities of opinion. What starts as honest questioning can be seen as personal criticism on the one hand, or as irresponsible experimenting on the other. I know now that, as our programs became more and more individualized with more freedom given to more children in more ways, and as the school environment changed, we were constantly assailing the sensibilities and value structures of many of our parents. They deserved some sort of explanation in clear, uncomplicated terms.

Fortunately, our tendency to overlook parents' views did not become epidemic during that summer and early fall. I suspect the main reason was the fact that people were still caught up in the euphoria of the possibility of new facilities, fund-raising, and attendant activities.

The third year opened in good shape. Trustees' meetings were concerned with feedback from uncertain attitudes in the school; several short-range programs were mounted; we decided to push forward with a precise statement of space needs; and I was asked to formulate a plan for enlisting more parent participation.

Space needs were easily articulated with the help of a feasibility study by an architectural firm. However, as we got into this study the need for more precise philosophical definitions became more and more evident.

Fortunately, this was also the year of our evaluation by the Independent School Association of Massachusetts, the criteria of which forced us to face where we were philosophically. I don't know why we had not already explained to everyone that we were becoming more informal and were indeed most sympathetic to the philosophy of the open classroom and integrated day. Perhaps because much of what we were doing had grown from crude beginnings

several years before, we lacked the confidence to articulate this new emphasis to our constituents. However, when we looked at what we had put on paper as a result of the self-evaluation, and after the visiting committee had confirmed the fact that we were indeed doing what we said we were doing, the fact was obvious, whatever we wished to call ourselves, that we were now an open school.

With this realization weighing upon us, and with a certain amount of soul-searching on the part of the trustees — who were trying to keep up with its full implications — we committed ourselves to a fund-raising and building program to allow for an expansion of the school. At this point things happened very fast. Professional fund-raisers were interviewed and hired; an architect-selection committee was set up; and the long-range planning committee wound down a bit. It was at this point that a most fortunate thing happened to us. The president of the board had the foresight to persuade a parent who was a practicing educational consultant primarily involved in school buildings to serve as the head of the building committee. This one person eventually saved us great quantities of energy, time, money, and anxiety.

We started with the curriculum and spent much of our early time in building-committee meetings dealing with the true purpose of the school. To check all of our systems, we once again reviewed our reasons for existence: what kind of school we were and in what general direction we wished to evolve. Fortunately, we had faced up to these questions earlier and were in good shape to deal with them.

We then began to concentrate upon the individual child and his needs. With a great deal of help from the faculty and free advice from colleagues everywhere, we were able to examine our curriculum and express it in terms of movement, activity, and, most important of all, environments from the point of view of the child and his learning. This was particularly fascinating to me, and a source of some humorous frustration to the fund-raising group, who were asking for renderings, flow plans, architectural styles, and the like. At that point we had no architect. I know now that we were far ahead of where we would have been if an architect had been present. This is not to criticize the profession, but rather to state that we avoided the trap of getting carried away with the exterior of buildings without thoroughly analyzing the activities that would go on inside, from the child's point of view.

The end result of this preliminary work was a set of crude but effective educational specifications that spelled out the activities a given child or group of children would be engaged in during the day; the needs — emotional, intellectual, and social — of those children when engaging in those activities, and the setting needed to provide those experiences for the child. This having been accomplished, we engaged an architect who was then able to see that the proposed environment was to be created out of wood, metal, cinder block or whatever. This systematic approach to building saved us considerable time, even though some parents began to show impatience.

BUILDING

I know now that there are many techniques for educational planning in both the philosophical and logistical senses. These are often overlooked as possible ways to plan and build cost-effective structures. Much more work needs to be done by all schools in this vital area.

We got some working drawings in short order and sent them out for bids. After a lot of haggling, we settled on a contractor and a price and began construction in the early winter. From that point on things went smoothly and we could turn our attention back to the business of education.

That winter now appears as one of the most crucial periods for several reasons. First of all, the spaces we were either building or renovating were very open, and, as they began to take shape, the true impact of flexibility of curriculum and program became apparent. I sensed a mixture of anticipation and outright fear on the part of many people as they watched the forms take shape. "What will it feel like?" There was no way to answer that. We probably should have spent at least another year with a large open "laboratory space." This would have allowed everyone to become more familiar with the possibilities and problems of an open environment and might have helped to ease some of the concerns of the school community.

Fortunately for us another windfall came our way in the offer of another parent, a psychiatrist who specialized in working with groups in schools in the process of change. He appeared one day in midwinter to volunteer his services

to help us face the uncertainties of what we were getting into in terms of philosophies and buildings. This probably was one of the most important things that happened to us. From that point on, there was an optional meeting of a nonthreatening nature once a week for interested members of the faculty and staff. Gradually all of the faculty became intrigued by what was happening in these sessions. With the help of this talented man, we learned to share, confront, and examine our own attitudes and feelings toward our colleagues and toward change. It was *not* a sensitivity session or T group, but merely a group of people getting to know each other much better and being able to admit when things were or were not going well and receiving support from their colleagues.

The rest of that winter saw the building going along. The school community, while excited about the prospects, was still uncertain about what things were actually going to be like. The pressures of time continued, since we were committed to expanding into the seventh grade a year after the opening of a prekindergarten group, and our facilities had to be ready by the following fall. Our systematic building program was of great use to us: we were able to keep construction moving smoothly, and we knew what had to be done to make up for delays that might set us back.

As spring came, we inaugurated several new communications techniques for the parent body, even if somewhat late. Our first step was to explain in detail what the seventh grade program was going to be. Many of our parents were wholeheartedly in support of the reasons for seventh and eighth grades but still wondered if their children could "get into" the secondary school of their choice at the ninth grade level. Thus we faced the moment of truth.

Our plan was to add the prekindergarten one year, the seventh grade the next, the eighth the following year. This seemed easy to accomplish with the prekindergarten group, but many parents were extremely anxious about deciding whether to stay here for seventh grade or to apply to another secondary school. The old "getting into" syndrome was laid bare. From innumerable talks with various secondary schools about their admissions, I felt intuitively that they were in as much of a state of flux as we were. Since it is hard to sell intuition to parents, we decided to take out some "insurance" by doubling the size of our fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for the coming year — an interesting maneuver, because it put even more emphasis on the fact that the facilities had to be enlarged. The building committee felt it was a proper thing to do, and so we had no trouble expanding the top three grades. In addition, I received permission, through the foresight of the board, to hire the additional faculty needed for the upper levels a year in advance. This also allowed the seventh and eighth grade faculty to spend a year in planning while working with the top three levels of the lower school: students whom they would eventually have in their own rooms. Although this obviously put a great strain on the budget, it was well worth it.

During the rest of the spring we were busy processing applications and I was interviewing teachers. Fortunately for the school, this coincided with the teacher surplus, so there were many strong candidates, especially men.

If I had to do it over again, I would set up several day-long workshops in an adult-sized open classroom for the purpose of screening 15 or 20 applicants. This plan is based on my firm conviction that filling jobs individual by individual is outmoded in the addition of the numbers of people we planned to have in one environment. Because one has to put together a group of people who are almost self-selected in terms of the ways in which they work and relate to one another, a workshop setting seems a particularly good way to ascertain those qualities. Somehow we were fortunate in the selections we made, and to this day I count my blessings for the quality of the people who cast their lot with us.

The school year ended on a strong note primarily, I suspect, because of preoccupation with the structure now emerging from the ground and the activity that was taking place. It was interesting to me in all of this that, as we expanded our top classes and got ready for the "big push," we had no lack of student applications for the school, and this happening at a time when other independent schools, primarily at the secondary level, were starting to experience a decline in their enrollments. Somewhere toward the end of the year it occurred to me that most of the new families coming to the school were distinctly different from many of our founding families. They had actually sought out our school as something for which they were willing to make substantial financial sacrifice and, in some cases, extensive travel commitments as well. This "new" group of parents brought an extremely interesting dimension to the school.

New Era

The summer went along without incident while facilities were being prepared for occupancy. The new teachers for the expanded school had set up work spaces and were busy with their preparation. Most of my own efforts were aimed toward finishing the facilities on time. Thanks to the foresight of the head of the building committee and our "crude systems" approach, this was not an impossible aim.

School opened on time, and an interesting dynamic made its appearance. I don't know whether it was the addition of new facilities or whether we had achieved some sort of "critical mass" of people and ideas, but the sense of sharing and cooperation rose to a high level. This was most evident during the process of occupying an open-space building, with its possibilities for new programs and different ways of organizing a school.

At our first faculty meeting we found ourselves ready to adopt a confident view of the new prospect. Each teacher was left somewhat to his own devices to decide how he wanted to present the new programs to the parents, for we had decided against the large-group approach. This is not to say that an all-school parent meeting is not an acceptable vehicle for communication, for it obviously is in some cases, but we felt that the particular kinds of parent involvement in our developing plans and facilities would not be best served by a large meeting. (I have seen too many meetings of this sort dominated by one or two people who

monopolize the entire conversation to the detriment of a more thoughtful, and a more representative, participation.)

Instead we decided to hold small-group meetings, class by class, and to break those down into still smaller groups if necessary. We did not initially have an open-door policy because the teachers were still adjusting themselves to the environment and the programs they were trying. Each teacher, with a "room mother," was responsible for setting up his own plan of communication. These plans were roughly coordinated by the administration. These small-group endeavors took many forms, some of which worked better than others.

We found that a back-to-school approach, with all of the parents in a class coming in to experience a sample of open education for themselves during an evening or afternoon session, worked well, depending on the strengths and personality of the teacher. If the teacher knew the parents in a nonschool situation, his job seemed to go more easily, but to bring people together who had never seen each other before and put them in what might seem to them a threatening environment did not work out at all. We tried this approach mainly with our middle grades (2, 3, and 4); the results of experience caused the upper-grade teachers to try a somewhat different method.

With a great deal of investment in time and organization, the teachers in the upper grades arranged for all parents in grades 5, 6, and 7 to meet informally on a purely social basis in private homes with two teachers and five or six couples. Plans were discussed in advance with the host and hostess. Parents were asked to try to keep the discussion focused on general principles rather than on specific techniques. The result was that all of the adults had a chance to get to know one another better and to share basic views on education.

This round of informal meetings was followed by a second one, or set, again outside of school, in which emphasis moved to more specific programs and to the needs of specific groups of children. We found the parents more willing to "open up" in their homes than in the school. Since they knew the teachers involved, it was a very successful series of evenings. All of this took approximately four or five weeks. Meanwhile, school was going along very well.

The final part of the upper-grade communications was an experiential session one evening at school in which we placed the parents in an open-classroom environment and asked them to interact and participate, just as their children might do. By this time they had some idea of what to expect, and if they were not entirely convinced at least the majority were receptive and did not feel threatened.

Another technique, combining the two approaches that we had tried in the middle and upper grades, was used with parents of four-, five-, and six-year olds. In this instance all meetings were held in the school building itself, but with variations. A questionnaire was sent asking parents to sign up for any one of six discussion groups in which they would like to participate. Topics for these discussion groups ranged from play to discipline to "What do you expect of the school?" On the designated night all of the parents gathered and then divided into groups led by individual faculty members. After two hours of discussion

the groups reconvened, with a parent sitting in a "fish-bowl" group and reporting to everyone what each group had covered. That evening was followed two weeks later by a second evening where parents were brought into an open environment and encouraged to work with materials. At the end of this session the parents broke up into small groups for a review of their parental concerns from the previous two sessions. There was a final group session, which broke up into smaller groups, where parents specifically addressed themselves to those concerns.

All of these activities occupied most of the fall for the entire school community. It is a tribute to our faculty and their families that they wished to put in this amount of time for communication, for some of them were out two or three nights a week. It is also a credit to the parents that they were willing to give as much time as they did to learn what we were doing. Meanwhile, the faculty devoted great energy to clarifying and improving our techniques in an atmosphere of dedication to our new opportunities.

During the fall we worked together in various combinations more or less constantly. For example, the entire faculty met once a week. Each division of the school (lower, middle, and upper) met once a week, and we had a session with our communications specialist once a week. In addition, every member of the faculty had a standing appointment with me once every eight days. I don't know whether it is possible to meet too much, but we found that we needed to share our ideas and feelings frequently as we got into the year. By Christmastime I was faced with the need to wind the faculty down. We did this by scheduling a full and "highly important" faculty meeting at which a full range of re-

freshments was served and the entire school community, including the staff, spent the better part of one Friday afternoon and evening in one of the best parties I have ever been to. Since it coincided with a vacation period, people were able to relax completely with a sense of real accomplishment.

The rest of that year progressed smoothly. We were encouraged, as our curriculum for grades 7 and 8 took shape, by the growing number of parents who indicated a desire to have their children stay on. As the end of the year approached we started making specific plans for teachers to attend workshops, visit other schools, and work on curriculum projects during the summer with financial support from the trustees. Our already liberal allowances for the continuing education of the faculty were enlarged to cover these additional needs.

That summer and fall were rewarding times for all of us. We had constant activity throughout the school, not only from the work of regular faculty, but from a very interesting and unusual "open" summer program in the creative arts. There were numerous opportunities for continuous sharing of curriculum development by all. We opened the school year with a spectacular "sharing session" whose results were immediately apparent. Not only was there much new (primarily homemade) equipment available, but the teachers seemed to be relaxed and confident. The entire faculty had grown in terms of self-understanding, a growth that was apparent in attitudes toward one another and toward the environment as well. Noise, for example, which had been considered one of our prime concerns and irritation points the year before, seemed to fade into the background. We had installed some foam-rubber baffles to suppress it, but the first thing many people did was to remove them.. People started venturing out of their designated areas, and the "common space," which had been designed for the use of all, started filling up with interest centers. The school took on a warm, responsive attitude that transcended the good feeling of the year before.

This is not to say that there were no longer parent concerns or questions. Thus we began to repeat some of the techniques of the previous year, with discussion groups, coffee meetings, and open-classroom experiences for parents. However, there was a sufficient "critical mass" of parent feeling about these experiences for a great deal to be accomplished. Those who were not completely convinced of the program themselves were pleased by the positive attitudes of their children.

During the fall we established several school-wide interest centers, notably for science and mathematics, which were organized on a nonscheduled basis. Large blocks of time were designated for certain age groups to use these centers as they saw fit with or without their teachers. The specialists in these areas worked primarily as resource people and yet were able to monitor the activities of large numbers of children who were flowing through their areas. This ability to keep track of individual children in the midst of an informal learning environment is one of the accomplishments of our hard work together.

There were still a number of continuing concerns, however. One was the handful of children who were having difficulty in adjusting to the amounts of

self-direction and initiative that are required in an open classroom. We finally came to the realization that there were some children who were not ready to function in the environment we had created, and we had to tell their parents that this was the case. This was one of the most difficult decisions we had to make. If open education is designed for the needs of the child, what does one do when the different needs of the parents become entangled with those of the child? It is hard to tell a parent that the school is not meeting the needs of his child. It is threatening to all parties involved, but it is something that must be done. Since we had changed the school from a traditional pattern to our present one during the tenure of some parents who had come to us earlier, it was especially painful.

In order to avoid a repetition of this problem with future applicants we reviewed our entire admissions procedure and added some simple value-assessment exercises which helped to determine the extent to which parents would be in harmony with our educational beliefs and we with theirs. Some of the trustees felt that this plan would frighten people away, but in practice the reverse was true. Parents now know the kind of education that their children will have. We seem to be developing an even more loyal body of parents who are seeking us out for reasons which are compatible with our basic purposes.

As of this writing, my sixth year at the school has just closed. We have strengthened our curriculum in all areas, have full seventh and eighth grades, facilities which are functioning fully and are a bit neater than they were in the fall, and people who are generally happy. We have attracted the attention of groups outside our area, and the faculty have run several series of workshops for teachers and administrators from other schools who are interested in open education.

Many of our year-end questions are concerned with measuring what we have done. We have used standardized achievement tests and other diagnostic instruments (the results of which the faculty were able to predict with statistical reliability a week ahead of time). We need to find ways of measuring growth in the affective domain and in the areas of problem-solving skills, intuitive competence, and interpersonal relations. We find ourselves searching for better answers and more effective techniques.

We feel we have brought a large body of people — parents, children, and teachers — from one point to another with a great deal of interest, stimulation, and growth. We have reached significant agreement that a school should be a place where growth in understanding takes place for all — old and young — who are associated with it, and that this should be the central purpose of education.